

Oct 2010

# ASAA Newsletter Oct 2010

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## Meira Chand's New Novel

Meira Chand has published her eighth novel entitled, *A Different Sky* (Harville Secker, NY). Beginning with Singapore's first Communist riot in 1927, and set in the years before independence, *A Different Sky* follows the lives of three families and the struggles they face during this crucial phase of the country's history. Born and educated in England, Ms Chand has lived much of her adult life in Japan and briefly in India before she moved to Singapore in 1997 where she currently lives. Her multi-cultural heritage is reflected in her novels, which explore the issues of identity and cultural dislocation.



The launch of Meira's novel in Singapore was a high profile event attended by the President of Singapore and numerous public personalities. The book was actually written in response to a request by the President

to Meira years ago to compose a work which would highlight some of the most significant events in Singapore's history. After seven years of intensive research, Meira's publication is being hailed as a masterpiece among historical novels, highlighting the ability of the creative artist to re-create the historical past and make it live again for contemporary audiences.

Meira has a special connection with ASAA and Australia. She is currently completing her doctorate at Edith Cowan University...Meira attended the ASAA conference in Sri Lanka (Dec. 2009) and also kindly agreed, despite indifferent health at the time, to travel to Jamshedpur, to attend the International Conference, "Diaspora" organised by Dr. Keya Ma-jumdar, held in February 2010 as a distinguished guest and read extracts from her writing to the audience.

## New Release

Indian people in 'bi-cultural' New Zealand have long been an invisible minority, rarely mentioned in our history books. *India in New Zealand: Local Identities, Global Relations* (2010), ed. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay is a second contribution to remedying this historical silence, following the publication of *Indian Settlers: The Story of a New Zealand South Asian Community* by Jacqueline Leckie. The first section introduces the context, briefly tracing the history of Empire and migration, which saw a few hundred adventurers from Gujarat and Punjab braving the seas and settling here in the late 19th century. Today, Indians constitute the second-largest Asian-Kiwi group in the country's population (having more than doubled in number between 1991 and 2001). This increasing diversity has initiated a fresh debate on New Zealand's changing national identity, with the emphasis shifting from its bicultural foundation to greater recognition of ethnic minorities within the nation-space. The second section critically addresses the issue of a distinctive and uniform 'New Zealand

Indian' identity and rethinks diasporic identity. In the third section, the Indian diaspora in New Zealand is looked at from a wider global perspective.

## First Volume New Series by Australia-India Council Award Winners

Arindam Das, Lecturer, Dept. of Humanities, Heritage Institute of Technology has been awarded an AIC Fellowship (2010-11). Sarbojit Biswas has been appointed a Research Fellow with UNSW (2010-13). Arindam and Sarbojit have collaborated to publish the first volume in a series: *Colonial Spectre and Beyond: Studies in Indian Writings in English*. The series that has been initiated is unique in two ways: it is not only about Indian writings in English but as the title suggests it aims to focus also on vernacular literature that has been translated into English; along with articles on scholarly research this series will also publish creative work. This first volume will have a previously unpublished short story by Meira Chand, a Singapore-based Indian Diasporic writer. Further unlike the multitude of anthologies on Indian POCO-lit, this series is a definite break away. Cynthia vanden Driesen (Edith Cowan University, Western Australia), who has research interests in Indian writing in English has written a foreword to the volume. The following quotation from the foreword offers the justification for this exercise: 'What then is my justification (as an Australian academic) for writing this Foreword to this volume? Just perhaps that my own interest in this field of writing was sparked very early in my own career and led me to explore the field in some detail, through the deliberate choice of working in it as a part of my own postgraduate studies. The volume starts with Arindam Das's Lacanian Gaze theory analysis of Rabindranath Tagore's "The Hungry Stone" and covers the range till Kamala Kanta Bori's analysis of identity issues of Mamang Dai's "The Legend of Pensam". Chand's short story "Crystal Palace" perfectly balances the concerns of the British colonial spectre still looming large in the lives of contemporary Indians and also suggests their capacity to move beyond it.

## Professor Vijaysree Chaganti

Professor Vijaysree Chaganti (Osmania University of Hyderabad) will visit Edith Cowan University as Visiting Fellow from October 2 to October 22, 2010. She will have a demanding programme of lectures for undergraduate students and postgraduate and staff seminars. These will be mostly in her areas of expertise of Indian writing in English, as well as diasporic and postcolonial writing. It will be her first visit to Australia.

## 2010 Australian Film Festival

Australian High Commission and India International Centre organized 2010 Australian Film Festival at New Delhi on 31 May 2010. H.E. Mr. Peter N. Verghese, Australian High Commissioner to India, inaugurated the festival. The inaugural film "Look Both Ways" was greatly liked by the audience.

## Forthcoming Events

### AAALS Conference

The AAALS calls for papers for its 27th Annual conference to be held in conjunction with ANSZANA in Forth Worth, TX, from February 17 to 19, 2011. As always, the conference will be collegial and open-minded, welcoming papers from many different approaches and contexts. Since this will be our first official conference as the American Association for Australasian Literary Studies, we particularly invite material on New Zealand literature and film and its international connections. We also are especially interested in papers on Indigenous Australian literature and Maori literature in New Zealand. Welcome as well will be papers dealing with the two giants of Australian literature we have recently lost, Peter Porter and Randolph Stow, and writers whose centennials are in or near 2011, such as Elizabeth Riddell, Allen Curnow, Denis Glover, William Hart-Smith, and Patrick White. As always, submissions on any other aspect of Australian, New Zealand, or South Pacific literature, culture, or film are welcome: local, regional, national, international, transnational, as well as comparative aspects of Australian literature with respect to other traditions. Please send 200 word abstracts to Nicholas Birns at birnsn@newschool.edu by December 1, 2010.

### EACLALS 2011

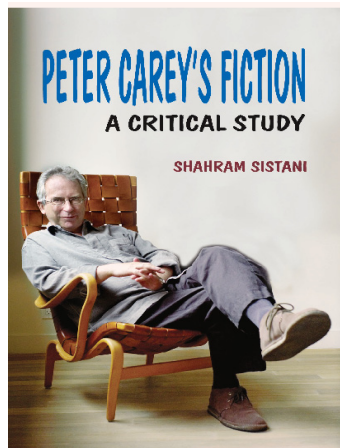
The call for papers for the 2011 EACLALS conference in Istanbul closed on 31 March and received an enthusiastic response, the deadline for the submission of proposals was again extended however until 31 May 2010. The full call for papers can still be consulted online at [http://www.eaclals.ulg.ac.be/documents/EACLALS\\_2011\\_CFP.doc](http://www.eaclals.ulg.ac.be/documents/EACLALS_2011_CFP.doc). The conference website will be available shortly.

### Celebration for Dennis Haskell

In anticipation of Dennis Haskell's retirement from UWA, the Western Centre together with the Association for the Study of Australian Literature is planning a symposium to recognise the major contribution Dennis has made to the many areas in which he has worked, on 17-18 Feb 2011. There will be readings, discussions and general celebrations at the symposium.

### The Novels of Peter Carey: A Critical Study

Shahram Raeisi Sistani teaches at the Bahonar University of Kerman, Iran. He pursued his research on the best-known contemporary Australian novelist Peter Carey at the University of Mysore, India. His book, *The Novels of Peter Carey: A Critical Study*, is in press and due for release in November 2010. The study examines the novels of Peter Carey from a psychoanalytic point of view. The book, it is hoped, will make a rich contribution to the growing corpus of Australian Studies in India.



### Australian Studies Conference

The Second International Conference of Indian Association for the Study of Australia, Eastern Region will be held on 22-24 January 2011. Theme will address the following issues:

- History and Culture
- Literature, Films and the Arts
- Politics, Foreign Policy, Media
- Global Economy
- Environment

Papers may be emailed to Professor Deb Narayan Bandyopadhyay, [deb-nara-yan@gmail.com](mailto:deb-nara-yan@gmail.com)

### Ph.D. Scholarships: Monash University, Melbourne

The IITB-Monash Research Academy is an existing partnership between the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay and Monash University, Melbourne. The students can take up research in several thematic areas focusing on the fields of Science and Engineering. Ph.D. scholarships will be awarded to suitable candidates with a generous grant, and receive a special fellowship to visit Monash university for at least six months. Closing date: 28 October 2010. For further information, website: [www.iitmonash.org](http://www.iitmonash.org) or email [student@iitmonash.org](mailto:student@iitmonash.org)

### News from Sri Lanka

#### Obituary: Tissa Abeysekera: Unparalleled talent, creativity & versatility

Tissa Abeysekera, one of the foremost personalities in Sri Lankan Cinema, literature and the Arts passed away last year on. He was at ease as a writer in both English and Sinhala. He described his bilingualism as one in which Sinhala was his mother tongue and English his surrogate mother tongue.

He won the Gratien Prize for English creative writing in 1996 for his book *Bringing Tony Home* His latest work in English *Roots, Reflections and Reminiscences* stands out as a work of art in which he embarked on a constant search for our roots and cultural identity.

Among his Sinhala literary works are: 'Ipanella' (short story) and *Pitagamkarayo* (novel), *Ayale Giya Sithaka Satahan* (essays), *Rupa-Svarupa* (essay on film) and *Cinema Sithuvili* (Art of film). He was also a literary critic who infused modern approaches to writing in both Sinhala and English.

He was a master of almost every aspect of Cinema from the writing of screenplays to acting and directing and an outstanding figure in tele-drama and use of the television medium for documentaries. He was the scriptwriter of the films 'Welikathara' and 'Nidhanaya' and director of the film *Karumakkarayo*, which was based on Gunadasa Amarasekera's novel. He also made cinematic creations, *Mah-gedara* and *Viragaya*. He displayed his skills as an actor in movies like *Weera Puranappu*.

He received many awards for his work in cinema, television and literature. His passing away leaves a gap in Sri Lankan arts and culture that will be very difficult to fill.

Tissa was one of the Sri Lankan Writers who was featured at the ASAA conference in Kandy, Sri Lanka, December 2009.

Nimal Sanderatne

Nimal Sanderatne published his third book of short stories, *Destiny and Other Stories* (2009). Kandy Books. In a review of the book Professor Ashley Halpe writes: "In all the stories we find the dramatis personae discovering destinies which are often un-guessed at but are always believable. Nimal has brought his command of nuance, effective undulation, the placing of echoes and satisfying resolution to a high level of accomplishment. . . . Taken as a whole, this volume is a well-designed exploration of the art of the short story."

## International Conference, Jamshedpur Women's College

A Report by Keya Majumdar

The three-day Interdisciplinary International Conference on "Diaspora Space: Voices and Voyages" organized by Dr. Keya Majumdar at the Postgraduate Department of English of Jamshedpur Women's College from 20 to 22 February had a grand ceremonial opening. His Excellency, Shri M.O.H. Farook, Governor and Chancellor of Universities of Jharkhand, inaugurated the Conference on 20 February, 2010. Delivering his speech as the Chief Guest, he gave a short overview of Diaspora, and aspects of the Indian Diaspora abroad. He congratulated the Principal and Convener Dr. Shukla Mahanty for arranging the Conference on such a large scale. Vice-Chancellor of Kolhan University, Dr. Father Beni Ekka in his speech took note of the excellence of the College in all areas of academic achievement. Principal Dr. Shukla Mahanty, in her speech, welcomed all the delegates, distinguished guests and scholars from all over India and abroad. Organizing Secretary and Head, PG Department of English, Dr. Keya Majumdar, introduced the themes of the conference—Voices and Voyages in Diaspora—as being multicultural, national and global. Guests of Honour for the occasion, Prof. Fakrul Alam, Bangladesh and Ms. Inez Baranay, Australia, congratulated the Principal and commended her effort to achieve the academic excellence as they expressed their pleasure to be present in the College. The college had a special relevance for ASAA as three of its office-bearers—Dr. Cynthia vanaden Driesen (Perth), Dr. R.K. Dhawan and Dr. Suman Bala (Delhi University) made a significant contribution to the programme. Dr. Keya Majumdar, the Convenor of the Conference, is on the executive of the ASAA.

There were four plenary presentations. Prof. Mohan Ramanan, University of Hyderabad, Dean of Humanities, spoke on "Home and Abroad: Some aspects of Indian Diasporic Literature". Prof. Debnarayan Bandyopadhyay, University of Burdwan, President, IASA, Eastern Region, delivered his Plenary on "From Burqa to Minarets: Customising Diasporic Community". Prof. Fakrul Alam, University of Dhaka, presented his Plenary on "Exile, Cosmopolitanism and Edward Said's Intellectual Activism. Dr. Cynthia vanden Driesen, Edith Cowan University, Australia, spoke on "Changing Skies and Celebrations: Aspects of the Sri Lankan Diaspora in Australia."

Two special sessions were arranged for Immigrant Policy in America and Mauritius. Lectures were delivered by Mr. M. Berkana, Deputy Secretary, American Center, Kolkata, and Prof. Vijaya Teelock, University of Mauritius.

To give a taste of Creative Writing, two Reading Sessions were organized in which Ms. Meira Chand (Singapore), Ms. Inez Baranay (Australia) and Ms. Roswitha Joshi (Germany) read from their creative writings.

Jamshedpur Women's College made history in arranging for the Keynote Address by Prof. Paul Sharrad (University of Wollongong) that was delivered through Skype from Australia to Jamshedpur. Prof. Sharrad was unable to attend in person due to sudden illness. The live transmission of his speech titled "The Enigma of Dispersal" held everyone spell-bound.



**A group of conference delegates at the House of Tata Institute for Excellence, Jamshedpur**

This Conference has helped enrich the College and Departmental Library too. Books, Journals and Infopacks for Library were donated generously by the American Center, Kolkata. The IASA President also donated books on Australian Literature, which will be introduced for PG Students of English. The College introduces the study of Australian Literature for the first time in Jharkhand, thus extending the horizon of opportunities for its students. An MOU with College was also signed in this occasion with President IASA, Eastern Zone, Prof. D.N. Bandyopadhyay.

## Multidisciplinary International Seminar on Bollywood's Soft Power

A Report by Anuradha Ghosh, Jamia Millia Islamia

The Multidisciplinary International Seminar on "Bollywood's Soft Power" organized by the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur during 13-15 December 2009 brought together a cross-section of scholars working in the field of cinema with special interest in Bollywood, making it a unique intellectual fiesta. As part of an on-going research collaborative project between Anjali Gera Roy from IIT Kharagpur, Nandi Bhatia from the University of Western Ontario, Teresa Hubel of Huron University College London and documentary film-maker Suresh Kr. Pillai funded by the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, the focus of this seminar was to address the tremendous cross-cultural appeal of Mumbai-based productions right from its inception.

Although the term 'Bollywood' has a pejorative connotation, it has taken a new turn through a kind of renewal that fills the vacuum opposing Hollywood and its other with scholarly attention to the

medium and a kind of universal popularity among people of all racial configurations. Although there is no T.S. Eliot in this case (he redeemed the term “metaphysical” coined by Samuel Johnson in his “Preface to Cowley” in the Lives of the Poets (1779-81) to highlight the poetry of a school of writers of the 17th century whose writing seemed anything but poetry) Bollywood also has a history that is redeemed by the power of its appeal that is rightly described as “soft”, following Joseph Nye’s claim in his book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (1990). Bollywood’s appeal being primarily cultural in nature, it manages to reach out to a transnational audience across all intersections of nation, class, caste, race as well as gender, addressing through its unique form and structure, a plethora of issues that trouble contemporary existence.

The contributions of David Schaefer, Communication Arts, Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio which was podcast from the National University of Singapore, titled “Bollywood’s Soft Power” and Makarand Paranjape, Centre for English, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, titled “Beneath the “Beyond”: The Hard and Soft of Deepa Mehta’s (Mis)adventures” stimulated a lot of discussion. The panel of actors, filmmakers, critics, media professionals as well as cinematographers comprising Dhritiman Chatterjee, Aniruddha Roy, Suhail Abbasi and Abhik Mukhopadhyay on the topic “Bollywood, Tollywood, Kollywood: What’s in a Name?” on 13th December 2009 was one of the most important events of the seminar along with the screening of Faiza Khan’s award-winning documentary *Malegaon ka Superman* with an introduction by Suhail Abbasi and the Bollywood dance performance by Gwenda vander Steene, Comparative Cultural Sciences, University of Ghent (Belgium) and Sanchita Chowdhury, a research scholar of the Department on the 14th of December. Australia made its contribution to the efforts of Devleena Ghosh, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, University of Technology, Sydney (Australia) entitled “Sweet Dreams are Made of This: Bollywood in Sydney,” as it foregrounded, among other things, why Bollywood is becoming the rallying point for resistance among Indians troubled by the recent unrest affecting Indian students in Melbourne.. The great success of the entire programme was due to the efforts of the organiser Anjali Gera Roy.



Centre: Anjali Roy, conference convenor, and some of the participants

## Reports from ASAA Travellers

**Barcelona; “Food for Thought”—1-5 Feb. 2010—organized under the auspices of the Australian Studies Centre, Universitat de Barcelona and the Centre for Peace and Justice, Southern Cross University, Australia. Susan Ballyn the Director of the Australian Studies Centre.**

This conference was the result of a longstanding exchange agreement between the two institutions and one of a series that has eventuated. While the main emphasis of the conference was on Australia, contributions from a wide range of other areas of expertise were also included as the principle of interdisciplinarity is central to the conferences organized at the Centre. The conference title had been advertised as being “literary and metaphorical in its widest sense.” The result was an intriguing and highly complex of conference presentations ranging from Anthropology and Archaeology to nursing and politics. Of interest to ASAA members is to note the numbers of ASAA members who had an involvement with the conference.



Sue Ballyn and Baden Offord, Conference Organisers of Barcelona conference, at the far right

Sue Ballyn—who presented a plenary address at the Sri Lanka conference in December 2009 outlining the establishment and development of this Centre in Barcelona. Baden Offord who collaborated with Susan in the organization of this conference was also a participant in the Sri Lanka conference. Isabel Alonso Breto from the University of Barcelona showed in her presentation at this conference that the continuing new developments that her research has taken since her Paper at the ASAA conference in Sri Lanka and her first delving into the themes of hybridity and displacement to be traced in the work of Sri Lankan-Australian writers. Cynthia vanden Driesen’s plenary presentation explored the representation of the convict in varied Australian literary texts and highlighted the potential claim for the convict to lay claim to the position of the earliest white indigene in the Australian context. Bill Ashcroft explored aspects of modernity in a well-attended plenary developing a new note in his research which had been touched on at an earlier plenary address in Sri Lanka. He remained after the conference to deliver “The Doireann MacDermott Lecture.” The Barcelona conference was an excellent example of how the ASAA network continues to expand at an international level.

## **EACLALS - Cumberland Lodge: The Invention of Legacy: A Tribute to Hena Maes-Jelinek Windsor (24-26 March 2010)**

The opening statement sent out to invitees to the conference read as follows:

*As many of you know, Hena Maes-Jelinek passed away on 8 July 2008. Hena was one of the founder members of ACLALS (Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies) and had been continuously active in it since the 1960s. She was chair of European ACLALS for two terms. As professor of English at the University of Liège in Belgium she initiated the study of post-colonial literatures there and fostered the careers of numerous students who have gone on to work in the field. Hena was a scholar of great eminence. She devoted her life's work to the study of Caribbean writing and to the work of Wilson Harris in particular. She was co-founder and co-editor of the Cross/Cultures: Readings in the Post/Colonial Literatures in English series (published by Rodopi) and was instrumental in seeing the work of numerous colleagues into print. She is greatly missed by her colleagues and friends around the globe.*

*To celebrate the memory of this formidable scholar, the Board of ACLALS is organising an event to be held at Cumberland Lodge, a conference centre located in Great Windsor Park, just outside London (<http://www.cumberlandlodge.ac.uk/>). This gathering, meant both as a conference and as a tribute to Hena, will take place from Wednesday 24th of March to Friday 26th March 2010...*

*The Board of ACLALS, Geoffrey Davis, Benedicte Ledent, Marc Delrez*

This was a conference with a difference. Set in the idyllic countryside of Windsor in Cumberland Lodge which is run more like an English country home than a commercial venue, the proceedings began with a series of tributes to Hena and her work, led by Alistair Niven, Director of the Lodge and long-time friend of Hena. All of the assembled scholars had known Hena and many were the reminiscences that flowed on all hands. Most of the papers focussed on postcolonial literature, particularly the works of Wilson Harris—Hena's long-time enthusiasm—and other areas which had been a focus of Hena's wide range of research interest. Australian literature was one of these. Cynthia vanden Driesen's paper interrogated Hena's reading of a scene in White's novel *A Fringe of Leaves*, in a paper entitled, "Cannibalism, 'Unspeakable Rites,'" Wilson Harris himself had been scheduled to attend but was prevented from doing so due to unavoidable personal reasons. He was represented in the closing sessions, by his daughter who had also known Hena and read her father's words of tribute and appreciation. Kirpal Singh, another ASAA connection, gave the plenary address at the conference. It was good that Cynthia and Kirpal were able to represent, in some way, Hena's large circle of friends in Asia. A previous ASAA Newsletter carried a special notice of Hena's passing and a tribute to her pioneer work (along with Anna Rutherford and Doireann MacDermott) in disseminating the 'new' literatures in English in Europe.

## **Patrick White Conference at Kings College, London: Patrick White: Modernist Impact, Critical Futures (23-25 June 2010)**

This conference is important in that it signals a continuing resurgence of interest in White studies which seemed to have fallen into a kind of decline since the 1990s. It is only the second internation-

al conference on White—the first being held at the University of Stirling in 1993. Both have been held under the auspices of the British Association for the Study of Australia (BASA). The conference was remarkably well-attended with important speakers such as David Marr—White's biographer and controversial speakers such as Simon During whose monograph on White has provoked angered responses from White enthusiasts. Simon During was given some uncomfortable moments in the questions that followed his presentation but all of this added up to a remarkably interesting conference. One of the most interesting papers was that presented by Professor Susan Harris who, with Professor Elizabeth Webby, is researching an ARC funded project entitled "Patrick White in the twenty-first century." Her subject was the recently discovered archive of White papers now with the National Library in Canberra. Professor Elizabeth Schaffer presented a fascinating paper on White's plays. As current President of BASA, she was presented with a collection of the three publications from the four ASAA conferences held thus far—and was interested to learn about the activities of ASAA—and requested to keep informed of our future projects. Cynthia vanden Driesen presented a paper at the conference entitled "Exorcising Alterity: Patrick White and the Indigenous Presence in Australia."

## **Participation in Academic Programs by ASAA Members**

Dr. R.K. Dhawan, Chair, Pacific Asia Network of Canadian Studies, participated in the PANCS conference held at Jerusalem in June 2010. He also attended the Japanese Association for Canadian Studies conference, held at Osaka, Japan, in September 2009. A number of scholars from India contributed to the grand success of the conference. Dr. Dhawan presented a paper on "Combating Ecological Degradation: A Case for Environment Education", Manpreet Kang (I.P. University) on "The Endangered Kingdom—Animal Stories, Children, and Ecopedagogy: Canada, Israel, and India," Dr. Suman Bala (University of Delhi) on "Ecofeminism and the Challenges of Globalisation: Canada and India" and Dr. Usha Dhawan (D.D.U. Hospital) on "Environmental Pollution and Its Impact on Human Health: Canada and India: A Comparative Perspective"

Four scholars from India presented papers at the ICCS Biennial Conference on Aging, held at Concordia University, Montreal in June 2010. They are: Professor K.R.G. Nair, "The Regional Dimension of Ageing in Canada," Dr. Suman Bala, "Aging and Intergenerational Solidarity: Canada and India," Dr. Amrit Kaur "Growing Old Gracefully: A Comparative Study of Ageing Men and Women in Carol Shields' *The Stone Diaries*," and Dr. Usha Dhawan "Aging Women and Mental Illness: Canada and India"

## ASAA Office-Bearers and Committee Members

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Signature:

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Members may send in items of interest to the editor.

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